

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NORTHWEST ILLINOIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JO DAVIESS CARROLL CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION ACADEMY HOST ANNUAL MANUFACTURING & TRADES DAY

HANOVER, ILLINOIS – Northwest Illinois Economic Development (NWILED), in partnership with the Jo Daviess Carroll Career Technical Educational Academy (CTEA), hosted their sixth annual Manufacturing & Trades Day event on Thursday, Oct. 8, 2026, with high participation numbers from area high schools and businesses.

The event takes high schoolers into area manufacturing facilities for site visits and to the CTEA for interactive hands-on learning sessions led by area trades-focused businesses and small manufacturers to showcase the potential of their industries and foster career interest. The day-long event also featured several area agencies and schools who offered information on their apprenticeship, job shadowing and trade school opportunities.

“This event is all about workforce development and youth retention. It is NWILED’s hope that by offering this experience to our region’s students that they better understand the opportunities and quality of life available to them in northwest Illinois after they graduate high school,” said David Schmit, NWILED Executive Director. “Our goal is to bring attention to local quality, in-demand career opportunities here in the region.”

Manufacturing & Trades Day is a regional event that is not only fun for the students, but it also creates a workforce development opportunity for employers. This October’s event had nine high schools from Carroll and Jo Daviess counties participating, plus Lena-Winslow High in Stephenson County. That combined sent approximately 285, primarily sophomore students, through the experience. Helping facilitate the experience were 38 area businesses and agencies, some with multiple overlapping roles.

Part of a student's day was spent at a site visit to an area plant. This year Zurn Elkay Water Solutions, Metform, PSC Group, Adkins Energy, Signcraft Screenprint, Riverport Railroad, Twin Images, and Neumiller Farms opened their doors to offer the schools tours of their production areas and operations. And there were corresponding Pop Ups happening with JCE Coop, Jo Daviess County Highway Dept., ITC Midwest, Village of Hanover, and Nicor Gas where field crews show off their rigs and talk about being a field worker or linemen for 15 minutes in the plant parking lot.

The second part of the students' day was spent at the CTEA where 30 interactive stations were staged. Trade focused businesses were there, along with workforce development and education groups, specifically Stateline Solar, Business Employment Skills Team, Galena Mill and Steel, Adkins Energy, JCE Coop, Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa, United States Penitentiary – Thomson, River Cities Heating, AC, Reirrigation, DC Rise Real Estate and A&D Rise Getaways, Highland Community College, Nicor Gas, Elizabeth Garage, Forster Products, Hudson's Tack & More, 4-C: Community Coordinated Child Care, Guy's Truck and Tractor Service, Angelic Paws Dog Training, Veterinary Associates, Molitor Plumbing, Midwest Medical Center, and Conlon Construction.

“Our mission is for Manufacturing Day to showcase career opportunities available for future professionals in our community (students) through student-friendly stations.” said Chad Stenberg, Executive Director at the CTEA. “We continue to strive to make Manufacturing Day a hands-on and engaging experience.”

“Participating in Manufacturing Day provided an opportunity not only to engage with students, but also to collaborate with educators in strengthening resources related to any renewable energy lessons,” said Corinna Eisenberg, Client Engagement Specialist at Stateline Solar. “We will be able to offer support throughout the school year by providing industry insights as a guest speaker directly to CTE students. Continued engagement allows us to connect with students approaching graduation, helping them better prepare for opportunities available in this industry.

Silvia Diaz, Higher Education and Workforce Development Navigator from the Northwestern Illinois YMCA representing 4-C: Community Coordinated Child Care, commented, “I had a fantastic time sharing elements of early childhood education with the 85 high school students that we spoke with.” And Kendra Nenia, Higher Education and Workforce Development Navigator said, “They seemed to really enjoy the hands-on activity of changing diapers on dolls. We are hoping we planted some seeds about the need for and importance of early childhood education and care.”

"At DC Rise Real Estate, we absolutely love being part of Manufacturing & Trades Day!" said Danielle Cline, DC Rise Real Estate Broker. “We recognize that most high school sophomores haven't given much thought to the real estate industry or the many career opportunities it offers. This event gives us a chance to open their eyes to the possibilities available right here in Jo Daviess County and the surrounding communities. Real estate is about so much more than buying and selling homes, and we love introducing students to an industry that offers entrepreneurship, flexibility, and unlimited potential for growth. We're always happy to welcome students interested in job shadowing or internship opportunities to explore the industry firsthand. If we spark even one student's interest in a future career in real estate, that's a win in our book!

And a big thank you went to Citizens State Bank and the Galena Area Chamber of Commerce for assisting with student lunch!

Of special note this year was NWILED's introduction of a new **Job Shadow program**. Some of the best classrooms have no walls, and with over 65 members, NWILED is now facilitating job shadows for interested students and career-changers in a variety of industry sectors. Job shadowing is a career development strategy where an individual follows a professional to observe their daily tasks,

meetings, and workplace culture. Those interested in building their professional networks, finding future mentors, internships, or apprenticeships, improving their soft skills, and or wanting to add the experience to a college application and/or resume may inquire. Currently, 13 NWILED members are committed to hosting job shadow experiences, and those members are Lemfco, Citizens State Bank, DC Rise Real Estate, Gronen, Stateline Solar, Carroll County Housing Authority, FEH Design, JCE Co-op, Dry Creek Beekeeping, B.H.M.S., City of Galena, Highway 20 Brewing Company, and Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa.

The 2027 Manufacturing & Trades Day is scheduled for Thursday, October 14. For more information or to register your business, contact David Schmit @ NWILED directly at 815-297-7361 or dschmit@nwiled.org. Information on NWILED's Job Shadow program can be found at www.nwiled.org.

ABOUT NWILED:

Northwest Illinois Economic Development was created by the Jo-Carroll Energy Board of Directors in 2008 to spearhead economic development structures, funding and progress in Jo Daviess, Carroll, and Whiteside counties in Northwest Illinois. Now in its 16th year of successful service, NWILED continues to be a regional development entity concentrating on growing the economy and public/private partnerships.

NWILED promotes economic development by fostering business growth and assisting expanding and relocating businesses. The organization aids in determining these needs for growth with cooperation from government and business partners.

NWILED encourages entrepreneurs by assisting with access to resources to begin and grow their businesses and employs all available resources to create a welcoming business environment, aligning the skills of the available workforce with the needs of businesses, and building political and economic capital.

NWILED's commitment to success also produces programs, ventures and events that nurture educational business growth and overall business community involvement.

ABOUT CTEA

The Jo Daviess Carroll CTE Academy (formerly Jo Daviess Carroll Area Vocational Center) has proudly been delivering quality career and technical education to high school students and adult learners since 1972. The CTE Academy is a collaborative public education entity of six local districts: Galena, River Ridge, Scales Mound, Stockton, Warren, and West Carroll.

The Vocational Center opened its doors to students from the participating districts in the fall of 1972, having undergone a few revisions over the years as career and technical needs of the districts changed. Juniors and Seniors, or students sixteen years of age, are eligible to enroll in a technical program. They must enroll in their home district with their Guidance Counselor. CTE classes are not required but are electives.

The CTE Academy is funded through tuition paid by the member districts and numerous grants. CTE classes offer dual credit through Highland Community College. There is no cost for these credits.

Over the years, the Jo Daviess Carroll CTE Academy has offered quality technical education to over 11,000 students in our community.